

Press Releases: Remarks to the Media

Remarks

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SECRETARY POMPEO: Good afternoon, everyone.

QUESTION: Good afternoon.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Before I get started, I want to let our fellow Americans know who are affected by Hurricane Florence that our prayers are with them. I understand there may well have been loss of life. Our heart goes out to them. Thanks, too, to all the first responders, military, civilian and the like, who are doing such good work. The federal government's help is there, and we still continue to encourage every American who's in the threatened path to

listen to government officials and take heed to their words.

We're also aware that there's a typhoon in the Pacific Ocean right now which will take a toll on our friends in the Philippines. Our prayers are with them as well. State Department teams are ready to deliver the appropriate help to the region at the right time.

As you all know, on Wednesday, President Trump signed an executive order that made clear that our administration will not tolerate foreign interference in our democratic processes. Elections are the foundation of our democracy, and preserving their integrity is a matter of protecting sovereignty and American national security.

Foreign malicious actors have used information technology and social media to open new fronts in their efforts to undermine our democracy and our core institutions. These actors want to turn Americans against one another and convince us that our institutions, our ideals, are defective. But we are resolved to defeat these efforts and make clear that those who interfere with our liberties will pay a price.

In the last few years, Russia has been particularly aggressive in using its cyber capabilities, disinformation, and other covert means to attempt to sow instability in America. As this executive order makes clear, if Russia or any other foreign government or persons acting on their behalf interfere in the United States election, there will be swift and severe consequences.

The order provides for mandatory sanctions against foreign persons determined to have participated in interference in our elections. It also provides for additional measures that could be capable of devastating or interfering in our country's economy. And if the government of that country authorized, directed, or sponsored, or supported election interference, we're going to come after them.

The State Department will continue to work closely with other agencies to identify, expose – and expose foreign interference directed against American elections, no matter which entity initiated it. We'll also continue to work with our partners around the world to stand against these threats to democracy wherever – and however – they rear their head.

I want to spend just a few minutes on this Friday afternoon talking about the team here at the State Department as well. Yesterday was a great day. It was a proud day. After Senate confirmation, President Trump conferred on four of our officers the position of Career Ambassador. Four of the State Department's finest: Philip Goldberg, David Hale, my Under Secretary for Political Affairs Michele Sison, and Dan Smith.

This is the highest and most prestigious rank at the Foreign Service. They should all be very proud. I know I'm proud of them. The American people too should be proud of Phil, David, Michele, and Dan representing our country. They have all proven over many years of service that their outstanding diplomatic skills and leadership qualities are much needed and that they are delivering. They're an inspiration, too. They're great leaders. I

congratulate them all on behalf of the all of my State Department colleagues.

It's a good step towards strengthening the State Department's leadership, something I have put at the top of my priority set in my first now several months here. I know that American diplomacy is most agile and most effective when we have our entire team in place. We need to have that senior leadership team empowered.

To that end, we do have some new leaders already making an impact. I mentioned David Hale. He's my Under Secretary for Political Affairs. We also have Director of Policy Planning Kiron Skinner, who I have not mentioned at the podium before. She is highly distinguished academic, knowledgeable across a broad range of issues, and she is going to make sure the best foreign policy ideas rise to the top here at the State Department.

When I went before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee I only made a couple of promises, but one of them was that I would get the team on the field. I knew that this was critical to strengthening the finest diplomatic corps in the world, and that's what I said that day. I told them I'd do my part, that I would fill those positions, I would work with the President to get the individuals nominated, and we have made great progress getting confirmable positions filled, and we need that progress to continue.

The places where we still have gaps, places like Western Hemisphere, where we have challenges in Venezuela and Nicaragua and in Mexico and the Northern Triangle – important areas, we need a leader.

We haven't had an under secretary for management here for quite some time. We need a confirmed person.

And in Near Eastern Affairs, a place that I have spent a great deal of my time in these first months, we are still looking for confirmation of our assistant secretary.

The list is long. I could go on. And I am just hopeful that we can finish the process so that both the Executive and Legislative Branch will have what it is I know each of us wants: a fully-fielded, capable team executing America's foreign policy.

And with that, I am happy to take a few questions.

MS NAUERT: And I'll call on you, just to help along. Matt Lee from the Associated Press to start. And you have one question each, please.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Hello, Matt.

QUESTION: Sure, hi. Good afternoon, sir. I was going to ask you about your interior decorating plans at your new house, but I thought I would instead start with something a little bit more mundane on the policy-wise. And that is that – on a policy question, that is that last night President Trump tweeted about one of your predecessors, Secretary Kerry, saying that he was having, quote/unquote, "illegal meetings" with Iran's foreign minister in what others have said is an attempt to undermine or subvert or coach the

Iranians on how to get around or avoid the new – your new harder, tougher policy on Iran.

I'm wondering if you share the President's view that these meetings are illegal. And whether you do or not, if you have noticed in your attempts to get the Europeans and others, to get them on board with the new U.S. policy, and that efforts by Secretary Kerry, or any other former official for that matter, is interfering in or undermining your efforts.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So I'll leave the legal determinations to others. But what Secretary Kerry has done is unseemly and unprecedented. This is a former secretary of state engaged with the world's largest state sponsor of terror, and according to him – right? You don't have to take my word for it. He – these are his answers. He was talking to them. He was telling them to wait out this administration.

You can't find precedent for this in U.S. history, and the secretary ought not – Secretary Kerry ought not to engage in that kind of behavior. It's inconsistent with what foreign policy of the United States is, as directed by this President, and it is beyond inappropriate for him to be engaged in this. I remember, I saw him. I saw him in Munich at the Security Conference. He was there with – if I have my facts right, because I think I saw them all with my own eyes – Secretary Moniz and Wendy Sherman, the troika. And I am confident that they met with their troika counterparts, although one can perhaps ask Secretary Kerry if my recollection with respect to that is accurate.

I wasn't in the meeting, but I am reasonably confident that he was not there in support of U.S. policy with respect to the Islamic Republic of Iran, who this week fired Katyusha rockets toward the United States embassy in Baghdad and took action against our consulate in Basra.

MS NAUERT: Next question.

QUESTION: Well, I just – has it had an impact? Has it hurt your efforts? That's the – that's just it, or –

SECRETARY POMPEO: I've –

QUESTION: Okay.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I think you understand what I – which it is that former secretaries of state – all of them from either political party – ought not to be engaged in – actively undermining U.S. policy as a former secretary of state is literally unheard of.

MS NAUERT: Lesley Wroughton from Reuters.

QUESTION: Secretary, good afternoon. I wanted to reach out to you regarding Russia and China are suggesting at the Security Council that you should be – the United States and others should be easing sanctions against North Korea given progress in their eyes so far in the denuclearization process. What signs are you seeing that they are perhaps not sticking to the sanctions, and how is that damaging your efforts at trying to get a full denuclearization

from North Korea?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So two things to say in this regard. One is that I spoke with Ambassador Haley about this earlier today. Russia has actively attempted to undermine the UN Security Council resolutions, the work of the 1718 Committee, the committee at the UN that evaluates compliance with sanctions, by attempting to change the language there. I hope that the 1718 Committee will do what it has historically done – remain independent and report on the facts as they know it and not allow a single country, in this case Russia, to draft language and have it inserted. I hope they will publish the original document that they intended to publish, which shows – it shows clear activities related to sanctions and sanctions violations. It's important; it's the date set that underlays not American sanctions but the world's sanctions from the UN Security Council.

Your question was broader than just that. The United States is as committed as ever to continuing to enforce those UN Security Council resolutions. We believe they are central to President Trump's efforts to convince Chairman Kim that full, final denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is necessary and that it needs to be done in a way that the world can see that there's been this strategic change in Chairman Kim's core understanding of how he will provide a better future for the North Korean people. He said it at the summit in Singapore and we are still continuing to have many conversations with the DPRK about how to effectuate achieving all the commitments that were made during the Singapore summit.

MS NAUERT: Elise, from CNN.

QUESTION: Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, ma'am.

QUESTION: On – by September 30th the administration has to give a determination or a decision to Congress about the levels of refugees that will be admitted into the U.S. for the next fiscal year, and there seems to be a debate or a discussion among some who are thinking of it as more of a national security issue and want to keep the levels consistent at a level around 45,000, while there are some that think it should be significantly lower, in the twenty thousands. I'm not sure if you want to give a specific amount, but can you talk to us about your thoughts about how you're seeing the level of refugees that should be coming in in the near future?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So there will be an announcement soon. You – the date – the deadline is, in fact, this fiscal year and so I'm confident that the national security team will deliver the President's recommendation. He'll make his decision about the appropriate level. It is absolutely a national security decision and it is also worth everyone here remembering that this is the most generous of nations when it comes to accepting persons from outside of our country. I am – I'm incredibly proud not only of what we have done as a historical matter, but the way the Trump administration has dealt with this issue as well. I am confident that the decision that comes out of this issue with respect to refugees for next fiscal year, America will remain among the

most generous nations with respect to taking persons from outside of our country. We always have and I fully expect that will continue.

MS NAUERT: Last question.

QUESTION: Can you say what your particular thoughts are in terms of numbers?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, I share those thoughts with the President and then when we have a decision from him we'll announce it. Thank you.

MS NAUERT: Last question, Rich Edson from Fox News.

QUESTION: Thanks, Heather. Mr. Secretary, do you think that this effort that you were discussing with the JCPOA, do you think it goes beyond those you mentioned, Secretary Kerry and Wendy Sherman? Do you think there are other former administration officials who are advising the Europeans and the Iranians? And will the administration sanction members or the board members or the entity of SWIFT if they continue to process Iranian transactions?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So second question first. I don't know the decision with respect to SWIFT in particular. There are still a number of decisions pending before the November 1st deadline – excuse me, November 4th deadline that we've got to make about waivers or potential waivers, and we're working our way through each of those. But make no mistake about it, come November 4th there will be a fundamentally different set of rules with respect to anyone who deems it necessary to engage with – in economic activity with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

It is a big, important day. You can see many countries already taking actions to move out of Iran, to discontinue doing business with them in advance of the November 4th deadline. They understand I think not only the seriousness of the U.S. sanctions but I think they're also coming to see that this activity is supporting the exact kinds of malign activity that President Trump has been talking about since the first day he took office, whether it's providing missiles that the Houthis launch into airports in the Gulf states or the activities we've seen taken by Shia militias against American interests or the assassination efforts underway in the heart of Europe.

I think the world is beginning to see that the challenge is much bigger than anything that the JCPOA even pretended to have addressed. And I also see they're thinking comments – they're seeing statements like the ones that the Iranians have said this week. They've said, boy, if we end up withdrawing, we'll start from a much higher level. I may have the quote off just a little bit but I'm very close. Wow, what does that say about the existence of the agreement, right? They're going to start from a much higher level. It tells you that the agreement itself didn't stop all of the paths to nuclear weapons in the way that it was sold to the American people.

Did I answer? You may have had a first question that I –

QUESTION: And the first question was are there any more administration officials who – previous administration officials who you believe are influencing allies and Iran? And also Secretary Kerry had mentioned that he

thinks that the policy of this administration is regime change towards Iran. Is that the policy?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No, it's not the policy. Ambassador Bolton and I both made very clear that's not U.S. policy, in repeated sets of remarks. We are very supportive of the Iranian people having the leadership that they want. And as for whether there are other former administration officials engaged in that behavior, I won't say today. Only to the extent that they are, the admonitions that I suggested for former Secretary Kerry would apply to them as well.

MS NAUERT: Thank you, everybody.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you all.

MS NAUERT: We've got to go. Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: You all have a – you all have a great weekend.

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